

The definitive guide to data-driven attribution

Explore marketing performance measurement best practices



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Opportunities for Growth

5x

Top-performing marketing organizations are five times more likely to use advanced attribution.

54%

By contrast, 54% of marketer still credit the last-click, only.

↓ 20–30%

Decrease in effective display and retargeting CPA.

↓ 25–50%

Decrease in level of effort to pull, aggregate, and distribute cross-channel reporting.

↑ 10–20%

Increase in optimization within channels including PPC, Affiliate, Email, and Social.

↑ 20–40%

Increase in performance across channels.

↑ 25–50%

Increase in overall marketing investment performance.²

Data-driven attribution helps marketers know more and guess less. If your organization is still focused on crediting only the last touch point for your marketing success, you may be leaving up to 20%-40% of potential return on investment (ROI) on the table.¹

This marketing performance measurement best practice offers an unprecedented level of visibility into the customer journey. It helps marketers make fact-based decisions, gain efficiencies, and realize greater returns on marketing investments.

This introduction to data-driven attribution will explain how and if data-driven attribution tools can help you move your marketing forward. We'll cover the questions attribution can help answer, how to find the right tool, and tips and tricks on getting started with a data-driven attribution program.

What is attribution?

Summary: *Assumptions about how marketing activities impact customers lead to a misinformed marketing strategy. Data-driven attribution reveals the real path-to-purchase, allowing you to fine-tune strategies based on real customer behavior.*

Attribution is the practice of tracking and valuing all marketing touch points that lead to a desired outcome. Data-driven attribution employs a powerful combination of predictive algorithms and integrated analytics to reveal—and properly credit—every bit of marketing spend that contributes to conversion.

The model matters

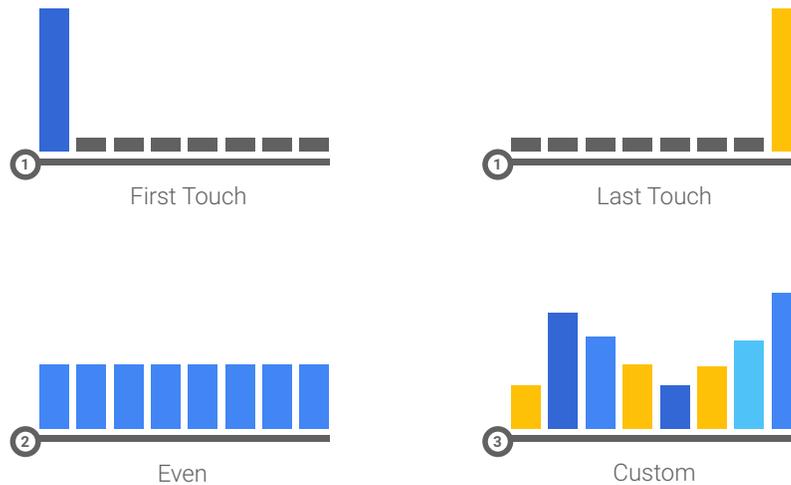
Not all attribution models are created equal. Simple or “rules-based” methodologies assign credit according to a predefined formula.

- 1. Single-Touch:** Assigns 100% credit to one touchpoint—usually the first or last touch.
- 2. Even:** Assigns equal credit to all touchpoints on the path—if 4 exist, each gets 25%.
- 3. Custom:** Assigns arbitrary credit to each touchpoint—the first is the “introducer,” the last is the “closer” and intervening points are “promoters.” Introducers and closers often get outsized credit, while promoters divide the rest without regard to order of exposure or creative assets used.

While simple attribution models offer general answers across a basic marketing mix, today's cross-channel marketers need a more scientific approach.

^{1&2} The State of Marketing 2013, IBM's Global Survey of Marketers. Global Summit 2013, n.d. Web.

Rules Based Models



Rules were made to be broken

Because credit is dictated from the top-down, rules-based attribution models obscure the real value of each touchpoint. By contrast, data-driven attribution models determine the importance of each touch point as data accumulates “from the bottom-up.”

Sophisticated algorithms determine which touchpoints are the most influential. By comparing each conversion path, factors such as the number of touchpoints in the sequence, the order of exposure and the creative assets used are all factored into results.

Next up: Now that we’ve defined data-driven attribution, let’s look at whether your organization is ready to use this measurement practice.

Would we benefit from data-driven attribution?

Summary: Look at your marketing mix and resulting data to determine your organization’s readiness for data-driven attribution. These solutions require volumes of high quality data – and an organizational appetite to take action on attribution insights.

Data-driven attribution is an intensive data-modeling exercise in which complex algorithms find and analyze statistically relevant patterns across volumes of quality data. Not all organizations have the level of data maturity required to benefit from a stand-alone, enterprise-level attribution solution.

Low data maturity

Data-driven attribution may not be a fit for organizations that have lower levels of data maturity due to little data or low data quality.

Low data. Organizations that do little measurable marketing, leverage few channels, and have little or no data are usually unable to use data-driven attribution.

Chaotic data. On the other hand, marketers who pursue many channels also struggle to use data-driven attribution. Non-standardized goals in the form of mismatching key performance indicators (KPIs) may prevent actionable insights.

High data maturity

Data-driven attribution benefits organizations with high data maturity characterized by large data sets and high data quality across the channel mix.

Focused data. Many “digital native” organizations focus all marketing efforts in digital channels, allowing relatively easy access to data. Ready access to high-volume, high-quality data make them excellent data-driven attribution candidates.

Systematic data. Companies that can access volumes of high-quality data across a complex online and offline marketing mix and that have people and processes needed to access data and take action on results are the best candidates for data-driven attribution.



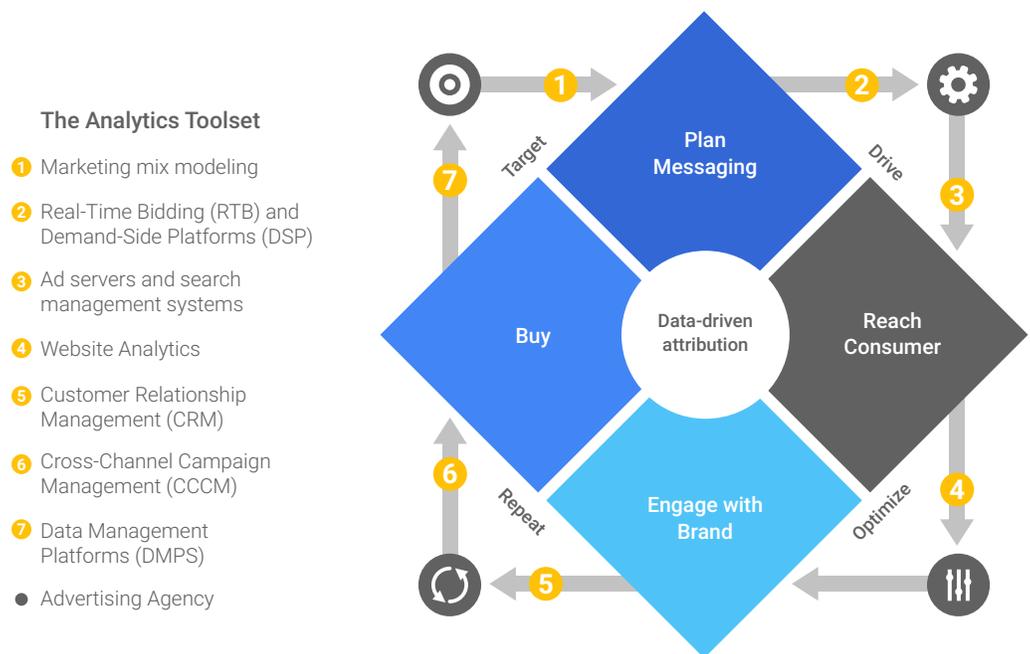
Pro Tip: If your complex marketing mix includes both online and offline channels, your data-driven attribution solution must be able to handle a wide variety of data sources and volumes. Make sure your solution can offer modern marketing mix modeling for a more holistic view.

Next up: *Build support for data-driven attribution by exploring how it fits within your organization's analytics toolset.*

How does data-driven attribution fit into my analytics toolset?

Summary: To build momentum towards a data-driven attribution practice, ensure that all key stakeholders understand the purpose and limitations of all analytics tools—and how attribution can unify and complete marketing performance measurement.

Data-driven attribution creates a “single source of truth” about marketing performance that unifies and completes your analytics toolset. While other tools provide specific insights, data-driven attribution provides an overall view of marketing performance. You can sit in a lawn chair to watch the big game on TV—but isn’t a recliner better suited to the task? A number of measurement tools help assess and track the customer lifecycle, but it is important to use the right tool for each job and to recognize the limits of each. Let’s explore the analytics landscape to see how attribution fits in.



1. Marketing mix modeling (MMM)

You’ve run your campaign and it’s time to re-assess the big picture. Do you need MMM or data-driven attribution? The answer is both. Attribution allows you to understand your marketing down to the user-level, accurately measuring the impact of each touchpoint and tactic.

MMM helps you look across all your marketing influences at an aggregate level, including factors like competition, and compares against your “business as usual”. For the best possible planning, make sure data-driven attribution insights are used to inform MMM.

Bottom Line: MMM helps you plan and optimize at the highest levels while attribution reveals granular opportunities for improvement. Use modern marketing mix modeling and data-driven attribution together for best results.

2. Real-time bidding (RTB) and demand-side platforms (DSPs)

How will your campaign reach highly targeted audiences across a variety of publishers? Programmatic buying platforms may be the answer. Based on conversion data, RTBs and DSPs can constantly improve placement targeting.

Keep in mind that since their revenues are tied to placement volumes, RTBs and DSPs have a vested interest in high attribution credit for their placements. Because they only measure the media they place, they end up over-crediting themselves for all conversions. They do not have the ability to assess the full path-to-purchase, nor can they accurately assess attribution credit for the media they place.

Bottom Line: *RTBs and DSPs have limited visibility and cannot assess credit in an unbiased or fractional way. Instead, offer data-driven attribution insights back to these partners to improve media buys.*

3. Ad servers and search management systems

Ensuring that ads are managed and served according to your media buy is the domain of ad servers and search management systems. These tools not only show you when and where an ad was shown, they also measure the basic performance of each asset.

As such, an ad server can reveal which ads are performing best—but only regarding portions of your campaign that fall within the channel it manages. Distributing credit for all conversions to this single channel can cause double-counting.

Bottom Line: *While ad servers and search management systems allow spot-checking within a channel, their focus is too narrow to offer data-driven attribution.*

4. Website analytics

Website analytics are critical for improving your website and mobile apps. The measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of on-site activities allow you to understand user needs and fine-tune your site to meet those needs.

Keep in mind that these analytics typically measure clicks immediately prior to a website visit. This provides only a “last-touch” or rules-based view of campaign performance. Upper-funnel touchpoints (such as display and social) are highly disadvantaged when held to this analysis.

Bottom Line: *Website analytics are a complement, not a replacement, for data-driven attribution. Attribution offers a more comprehensive view of what brought people to your site.*

5. Customer relationship management (CRM)

As customers roll in, your Customer Relationship Management system is there to capture transaction, contact and segment data, and that's a good thing. Remember that CRMs are primarily focused on customer service and support, not marketing.

Though CRMs can track multiple channels, they look mainly at lower-funnel activities. This offers limited visibility into acquisition and cross-channel marketing in “non-direct” channels like social, display or affiliate.

Bottom Line: CRM data is an input that can feed your data-driven attribution tool to yield a more complete picture of customer behavior.

6. Cross-channel campaign management (CCCM)

Cross-channel campaign management systems are similar to CRMs, but with a greater focus on marketing than on customer service. These marketing databases contain contact information—names, addresses, emails and SMS data—for both customers and prospects. This helps you determine which audiences to focus on and where to find them.

While CCCMs may help with selection and execution, they are unable to tell you how that audience responded, offering little or no performance analytics.

Bottom Line: CCCM data is a valuable input for attribution analysis. Once attributed performance is known, insights can be fed back to your CCCM for even better selection.

7. Data management platforms (DMPs)

Data management platforms intake first, second, and third-party data sets and provide normalization and segmentation. Marketers can then push this segmentation into live interactive channel environments.

While DMPs are excellent data collection tools that can provide input to data-driven attribution solutions, they do not in themselves provide channel mix insights or recommendations.

Bottom Line: Data-driven attribution tools complement DMPs. DMPs collect valuable segment data, allowing attribution to provide a deeper level of actionable insight.

8. Ad agencies

Let's suppose you develop a creative campaign with detailed targeting designed to catch the eye of your audience. A good ad agency is an invaluable asset in recommending strategy, creative development, and tactical execution.

Keep in mind that an agency's viewpoint is often limited to the channels they manage, and includes a vested interest in justifying their own value. While most agencies do offer analytics—and some are even building in-house attribution capabilities—they often lack the data, machine learning and mathematical expertise to tackle in-depth analysis.

Bottom Line: *Augment your agency's understanding with third-party, data-driven attribution. Insights you provide can inform, guide, and inspire agency teams.*

Next up: *To get serious about adopting data-driven attribution, consider the questions it can help your organization answer.*

What questions does data-driven attribution answer?

Summary: *Get ready to guess less and know more. Data-driven attribution offers insights both within and across channels to help you make fact-based marketing decisions.*

Data-driven attribution offers a clear, comprehensive view of the customer journey. Attribution insights help you look back, forward, and act on-the-fly. You'll be able to plan better campaigns and optimize those that are in-flight. Both kinds of insights are connected:

Budget planning. Wondering how to set your display budget? If you learn that display offers a 30% lift to search conversion rates, it makes sense to increase your display budget. This insight could also inform an overall marketing budget increase—more display may generate more search traffic for more overall reach.

Optimization. To improve an in-flight campaign, should you invest more in that top performing ad? If you're hitting saturation, it might be the wrong move. Data-driven attribution can show you the value of each incremental dollar, so you can make the right decision. With this kind of clarity, you may decide to allocate more budget to email or search, instead.

Before implementing an attribution solution, it is important to both understand and set stakeholder expectations around the three main benefits of data-driven attribution.

1. In-Channel Performance. See which elements of your marketing programs are working within each channel. Granular findings help you identify top-performers and act on the best opportunities.

- **Brand safety.** Ensure ads are not served on negative sites or next to inappropriate or brand damaging content.
- **Viewability.** Count impressions that are viewed and not those served off the viewable area of the page.
- **Monitoring.** Make sure geotargeting, pacing, and other campaign goals are being met.
- **Frequency capping.** Check that optimal daily frequency caps are in place and operating properly.

- **Geo and time of day.** Reach audiences geographically and at the right time of day with the appropriate message based on responses.
- **Creative messaging and placement.** Identify best and worst performing ads to ensure that the best creative, messaging, sequencing, targeting and placements are in the media plan.
- **Exposure.** Reduce overlaps between sites that do not increase conversion to eliminate wasted ad spend and guard against overexposure.

2. Cross-Channel Performance. Get clarity across all channels. Compare performance to correct both over- and under-spending. Breaking down channel silos unifies accountability and enables holistic planning.

- **Budget planning.** Understand the contribution each channel makes to the end goal to set the optimal budget.
- **Optimization.** Tweak and improve the performance of in-flight campaigns.
- **Impact analysis.** Lift and funnel stage reports reveal how channels impact the performance of other channels.
- **Campaign strategy.** Evaluate creative and placements across all channels to see which tactics are working and which should be changed to strengthen your message.

3. Efficiency and Cohesion. Replace time-consuming data comparison and reporting with easy-to-understand dashboards. Teams can move faster and make better decisions based on actionable insights. The best attribution solutions can even push real-time insights to external partners working on your behalf.

- **Unified metrics.** Assess all channels with a common set of metrics based on business goals rather than channel goals. Cut down on time spent “translating” metrics across channels.
- **Unified reporting.** Cut down on time required to pull reports from multiple systems. Minimize confusion across the organization on what results look like.
- **Reporting flexibility.** View reports in different ways. Rather than parse through a “one-size fits all” report, spend your time improving campaigns based on findings.
- **Ecosystem integrations.** Push insights directly to RTB or DSP partners for automatic optimization, cutting down on the time required to manually pass reports back and forth.

Next up: Select the right data-driven attribution partner for your business. A 5-step strategy can help bring marketing measurement to the next level.

Five steps to your data-driven attribution strategy

Summary: *Data-driven attribution offers a strategic viewpoint. Connecting marketing metrics back to valuable business outcomes is the key to driving business success with your attribution program.*

Data-driven attribution solutions differ widely. To get the benefits of data-driven attribution for your organization, you must ask questions, solidify budgets, and motivate resources. Here are five key steps you can take, right now.



Step 1: Define goals

Consider your current pain points and business goals. It isn't enough to find out how much "credit" each channel deserves. Instead, determine how attributed credit creates value for the business.

Begin by determining the value all your marketing activities must deliver for the business. Take a holistic view of data-driven changes you will make to meet those goals. Once you do, you will be able to see marketing's impact on revenue. From there, it's easy to formulate budgets that will yield high return for the business.

Here are some of the questions you should answer internally before beginning any data-driven attribution selection process:

What are your goals and metrics? Are they consistent across the business?

Data-driven attribution requires a common, unified success metric as well as knowledge of your long-term goals. Define objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) that align across channels and departments.

Attribution doesn't work overnight. It won't work at all if various business units or channels measure success differently.

Example: Is your goal to get more "likes" or to get more sales? While Facebook likes may be a goal for your social campaigns, the ultimate goal for your clothing brand is to sell jeans. Avoid "soft" goals and focus on finding a solution that allows you to see the lift social provides to sales—regardless of likes.

Pro Tip: Adopting data-driven attribution can mean overhauling internal measurement mechanisms. Do not undertake this task without clarifying and gaining consensus on business objectives.

"Move away from channel-only thinking. Bragging rights in the form of "my channel gets more than 50% credit," aren't going to increase sales in a vacuum. The metrics must connect back to business goals.

—Paul Pellman
Director of Data and
Measurement,
Google

What are your conversion events?

Your attribution solution will credit touchpoints along the way to your defined conversion events. If you are doing any website optimization, you have probably already thought about how to guide consumers to specific actions on your site. Whether it's a sale, a content download, or a lead form submission, define what digital conversions you will "attribute" towards.

Ensure that these conversion events are agreed upon across your organization. Make them the main goal across the entire business (not just for a specific channel).

What does marketing success look like?

Define what marketing must accomplish for your company as a whole. If you are accountable to help increase sales, is there a way to tie revenue or margin to your website or digital elements? Goals are not always based on revenue, but they must be based on something actionable.

Don't succumb to "shiny new object syndrome" by purchasing an attribution solution because of the buzz. Instead, carefully examine the questions you'd like to answer, clearly define success metrics based on facts and ensure that your goals are in line with vendor abilities.

Ready, Set, Go!

Once you've laid out your goals, you are ready to start the data-driven attribution selection process. On the road to a great solution, you will need to recruit cross-company involvement.

Don't overwhelm your team or other resources all at once. Taking on more than your organization can handle could sabotage your chance at success. Think about what you'd like your timeline to look like. It will take time to walk before you run. Pick a provider that will act as a long-term partner, and that shows potential for growth in the future.

Alternatively, avoid the "we're not there yet," mentality. Change isn't easy, but you will never be ready if you don't take the plunge. The results are well worth the effort but you have to take the leap!

Pro Tip: Identify a strong program owner who can set and manage stakeholder expectations throughout the process, and who will be able to resolve roadblocks.

"The optimizations we were able to make paid off the solution within a quarter."

— **Drew McKenzie**
Senior Manager,
Digital Media at Luxottica

Bottom Line: Data-driven attribution offers a strategic viewpoint to your marketing campaigns. Ensure that business goals are defined to connect marketing metrics back to valuable business outcomes so that data-driven attribution will help you drive business success.

Step 2: Justify budget

Attribution requires thinking outside the silo— and finding the budget required to break down those silos. Before engaging an attribution provider, set yourself up for success by earmarking a cross-departmental budget.

Since the analytics portions of your budget may already be allocated, guide the conversation by promoting the benefits of data-driven attribution to key stakeholders. The right solution will pay for itself by creating cross-departmental efficiencies and increasing your return on each marketing investment.

Bottom Line: To determine your budget threshold for data-driven attribution, consider its overall value to the business. Then, consider real-world returns of 5% - 15%.

A real-world exercise

Setting expectations around the potential results of data-driven attribution is critical. Account for any expense of your attribution program (external or internal) with realistic cost analysis to gain support for cross-departmental budgeting.

Let's walk through a budgeting exercise that typifies returns you can expect with data-driven attribution. Though no two businesses are alike, and there is no way to predict actual results, this outline offers realistic proportions. These low, average, and high yields can help you estimate your expected returns:

The current spending level

In this example, display, search, email and affiliate are the primary digital marketing channels. Look at the associated monthly spend, revenues, and conversions:

Channels and Current Spend Allocation Per Month

Channel	Spend
Display Impressions	\$375,000
Search Clicks	\$325,000
Emails Delivered	\$75,000
Affiliate	\$225,000
Online Spend	\$1MM
Current Digital Return on Ad Spend (ROAS)	\$2.50
Current Online Monthly Conversions	345,366
Current Annual Conversions	4.14MM
Current eCPA	\$2.90
Current Yearly Revenue	\$30MM
Total Yearly Spend	\$12MM

The level of interest

Now, let's consider the appetite for change. To estimate returns, you must take into account how much action your organization will be willing to take upon data-driven attribution insights.

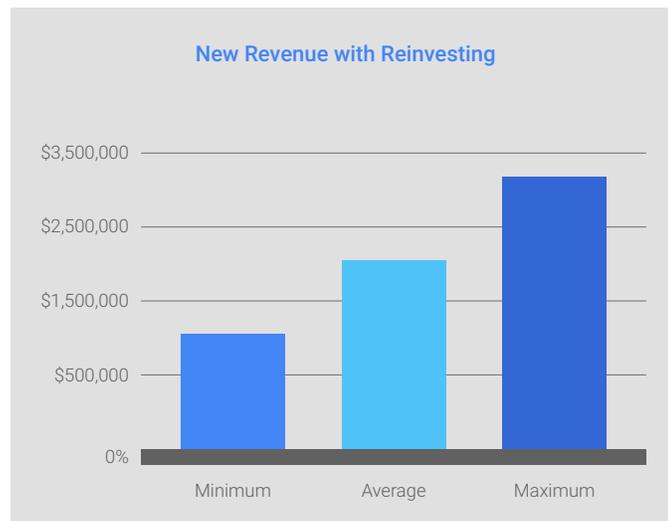
Often, organizations have a medium to high interest in results (interest must be fairly high to implement a solution) but only a moderate ability to take action. For the purposes of this example, we'll assume you can take action on some recommendations, but by no means all of them. This may be due to a lack of resources or the need to prove results before acting.

Interest in Implementing Change and Resource Investment Level

Feature	Interest	Resource Investment	Action To Take
Brand Safety	Medium	Low	Make sure that ads are not being served on negative category websites or next to inappropriate content that can be brand damaging
Viewability	Medium	Medium	Ensure that impressions are actually being viewed and not being served off page
Segment Optimization	Medium	Low	Ensure that the right segments are being targeted within search, email, affiliate etc.
Frequency Capping	Medium	Medium	Ensure that the optimal daily frequency caps are in place
Geo and Time of Day	Medium	Medium	Understand the core audience and their responses to target them geographically and at the right time of the day with the appropriate message
Creative Optimization	High	Medium	Use the right creative sequencing, targeting and ad combination across channels
Overlap Reduction	Medium	Medium	If there is overlap between sites, campaigns or channels that does not increase the conversion rate and is negative, then reduce the offending combinations
Planning	High	Medium	Use attribution insights such as top and bottom performers to plan out future campaigns
Optimization	High	Medium	Use non-linear optimization to tweak and improve performance of in-flight campaigns.

The level of potential returns

Let's assume that data-driven attribution recommendations yield 5% improvement at the low end and 15% on the absolute high end of returns (based on your ability and willingness to make changes).



Industry standard assumptions suggest that returns on an attribution solution will typically be 10x the cost of the solution. Even low results in all categories will allow you to justify budget for data-driven attribution.

Bottom Line: Even minimum returns recover the costs of a data-driven attribution solution. In this light, justifying a budget within existing marketing allocations may be easier than you think.

Step 3: Be selective

You have determined the need for a data-driven attribution program and successfully set aside a budget—but what solution will you pick? Which attribution partner will allow you to glean maximum results?

To find out, evaluate potential partners against the following key criteria. End-to-end considerations can make or break your ability to implement and take action on attribution insights.

Ease of Implementation

Data-driven attribution requires a lot of data. Ease of data gathering and integration are key considerations for success. At a minimum, your solution must be able to integrate all marketing event data (impressions, clicks, conversions) as well as cost data.

Many solutions add external and dynamic data sets (seasonality, audience data, offline conversion sets or dynamic bidding data) for even more robust results. Any solution that promises “quick and easy” implementation should be vetted carefully. These solutions may “simplify” by handling only a subset of your data — or they may simply be telling you what you want to hear.

To ensure that potential providers are grasping the complexity of your marketing landscape be sure to ask:

Can the provider handle our data?

Organizing your data will be a project in and of itself. A good partner should be able to provide flexible options for collecting data. Ensure your methods match what your partner can ingest. Pick a provider that can guide you through the process of setting up, collecting and transferring required data sets.

Is the provider certified with data tracking and integration partners?

Assess data onboarding efficiencies with the most commonly used marketing and advertising platforms. If you are pursuing a tag collection method, make sure that your provider is certified across the industry’s leading media partners.

Without a long history of certification, new approvals may take time to obtain—and that may be time you don’t have. Even in the case of log file data collection, check for a list of preferred and standardized partners and file types to troubleshoot onboarding.

How will this provider work with our agency or other partners?

Top marketers work with a variety of technology partners and marketing management organizations. Partner agencies or organizations may own various components of your data (for example, one for display data, another for search and so on).

While all players are critical to implementation, not all are direct stakeholders. During onboarding, it may take persistence, organization, and relationship management to get all parties to submit data in a timely manner. Check that your provider has the skills and experience to help you through this process.

Support services

How much support will your organization need to use and interpret data-driven attribution insights? Your answers will vary depending on the size of your organization and the skill sets you have available in-house.

In addition to evaluating a provider’s technology, don’t forget to assess the support you need versus what you can expect from any given provider. Check that your partner provides the right level of consultation, training, and direct access to experts to ensure you can leverage attribution insights.

"Ideally, attributed values would inform the mix models, so the mix models can optimize more effectively. Like a harmonious circle of life."

— **Tina Moffett**
Forrester

Does the provider offer consultation?

Do you plan to analyze data-driven attribution outputs yourself or do you want someone to help? Don't forget to consider your needs during onboarding as well as once implementation is complete.

Next, consider how much training you will need to operationalize your use of data-driven attribution. Will you want consistent support from a resource who has learned your business or do you prefer doing things on your own with occasional support on request?

Example: Can you get the insights you need when you need them? Your team may need to see creative by audience segment in order to know the best messaging for best performing audiences. Be sure that you can.

Will the provider offer direct access to experts?

Seek a solution with a balance between self-serve insights and access to experts. Evaluate the type and amount of access your provider allows you to have to database management, media and marketing planning, and analytics experts.

Even if you employ marketing analysts in-house, data-intensive solutions may require an expert team of data scientists—resources that can offer custom insights as opportunities arise. Even with a brilliant in-house team, gaining third-party perspective can be especially valuable in finetuning marketing practices across your organization. Advanced marketers still seek support due to the intense data expertise data-driven attribution requires.

Best-in-class methodology

What is the basis of your provider's attribution crediting system and is it inline with business needs? Ask tough questions to find out how the model works, how it is validated and how you can ensure accuracy.

Is the provider's attribution model data-driven?

Knowing that you wish to adopt data-driven attribution, be sure to establish that any provider you consider is employing an algorithmic model. Avoid providers who apply predetermined rules to assign attribution credit.

Is the provider media agnostic?

Consider partner motivations carefully. Does the provider have a vested interest in any media property? When a provider has a stake in the media serving or content landscape, they aren't an unbiased third party capable of giving you the best recommendations for your business.

Is the provider's model validated?

Your provider should be able to tell you how their solution's model is validated to provide accurate insights. One best practice to look for is lift analysis, in which conversion rates are compared by including and excluding touch points to reveal the true value or "lift" each provides along the way.

If excluding a touchpoint yields identical or similar conversion rates, the missing event offers little value. If including it increases conversion, the touchpoint demonstrates value, and deserves more credit. Probe into the manner in which your provider proves the value of their algorithms by asking them about validation.

How will your data inputs be monitored?

Gaining visibility into the customer journey may suggest strategic shifts, and create debates. Stakeholders may ask: "How do we know that these attribution insights are accurate?"

To answer that question, you need to be able to verify and monitor data inputs to ensure accuracy. Talk to your provider about real-time access to your data inputs, so your organization can trust the validity of the outputs.

Does the provider use all data, including non-converting data?

A sampled data set can provide directional information, but it doesn't provide a clear picture of all audiences and segments. A data-driven model determines the importance of each touchpoint by looking at the entire data set—including both converting AND non-converting data.

Ask potential providers about non-converting data. If the solution doesn't use this data, it can't offer insights about which touchpoints aren't working, and may overcredit them.

How does the provider handle viewability?

Up to 50% of campaign ads may never be seen by a consumer due to viewability. Ask potential providers whether ads that are served off the viewable portion of the page are given credit.

Accurate solutions will only count those ads that COULD have had an impact in the customer journey by being seen. If not, your solution is applying predetermined rules or assumptions rather than measuring the true impact of each touchpoint.

How does the provider handle average vs. incremental metrics?

If you want your data-driven attribution solution to optimize campaigns, check that it offers incremental metrics. While average metrics inform strategic planning for your next campaign, optimization requires an incremental view.

Simply doubling investment doesn't double returns. Rather, you need to see the impact of each dollar spent during a campaign to know where to spend the next dollar. Likewise, if certain conversions or actions are creating incrementally higher revenues, you'll need to be able to change your goals. Ensure your chosen solution offers incremental insights.

How does the provider handle external factors like seasonality?

Consider whether you want a holistic data-driven attribution model that can factor in external impacts like weather or seasonality.

For example, while retailers often see a spike around the holiday season, is their marketing driving growth in revenue or is it just the holiday season alone? A model that takes seasonality into account helps you make the best use of your marketing during the times of year when you spend the most.

Cutting-edge Capabilities

Different data-driven attribution solutions offer different capabilities. Is the solution you are buying comprehensive enough for you? Be sure to choose capabilities that are actionable for your organization.

Can the solution offer marketing mix modeling?

The worlds of marketing mix modeling (MMM) and attribution are colliding. The ability to combine data-driven attribution with MMM is rapidly becoming a reality.

As you assess possible partners, note those who are moving to combine additional offerings such as MMM. If you are using both traditional and digital channels, choose a provider that offers a solid approach to both.

Can the provider account for offline activities and sales?

While consumers research products online, the majority of purchases take place offline over a phone or in a store. While most digital marketers target online conversions only, to truly see the full consumer journey you must link online and offline consumer behavior.

Matching offline purchases to online marketing requires a provider that has built a technological platform that accepts the right data, but also that has built an array of partnerships to tie data from across the marketing ecosystem.

How does the solution handle multi-screen journeys?

More than a device to target, mobile is a connective platform. As consumers grab the screen that is most convenient to their purpose and location at any given time, marketers are reaching the same audiences on both PCs and mobile devices.

The right data-driven attribution solutions can help you to assess mobility across your media efforts. Explore potential providers' ability to identify users across multi-screen journeys.

Will your organization be able to operationalize insights?

Revealing the true value of each touch point with data-driven attribution is a huge achievement, but it's not enough. To understand what is driving your success, you must take action on the insights your solution provides. There are two main concepts to evaluate regarding ability to fully leverage data-driven attribution insights.

1. Access and Interpretability: Ensure that you can understand and easily act on data-driven attribution results. Check that the solution offers interactive access with a well-designed user interface. You should be able delve into your data in detail and customize views based on your role. Likewise, tactical budget recommendations should be provided in an easily exportable format that allows you to feed information directly to your media partners. The right solution should create internal efficiencies over time.

2. Cohesion with RTB Partners: Real-time Bidding (RTB) is the future of media buying. An ability to push data-driven attribution information directly to programmatic bidding platforms can increase the efficiency of your media buying without adding additional resources or costs.

Example: How much does attribution-informed RTB help? One company saw an estimated gain in efficiencies of 3-5% of PPC spend by integrating attribution results into search bid management platforms.

Can the provider offer audience segment data?

In an increasingly competitive market, you must understand who your audience is and how to best reach them. Picking a partner that has access to the best audience segmentation data—and that will incorporate this information into your reporting—is a critical advantage.

Ensure that your chosen solution partners with the top audience data companies and provides a variety of mapping options to capture the audience information you need.

Innovation roadmap

After careful consideration of any provider's current capabilities, looking at their technology roadmap will confirm the company's ability to keep up with the industry. Will your partner be positioned to handle your needs both now and into the future? It's great to ensure a provider offers the specific capability you need today. But what about next year when you triple your mobile spend? Or when you decide to tie a new social technology to your TV strategy?

Look at any potential provider's future strength by assessing the frequency of updates, strength of partnerships and their habitual response to feedback in order to select a solution that has the best potential to keep up with your evolving channel strategy, teams and tactics.

How often is the solution updated or improved?

Most data-driven attribution are still quite young, which can mean amazing growth spurts or big stumbles. What's the history of the company you are considering? Have they innovated quickly over the past years? Do they spend time on the right improvements?

It's ok if a provider you are considering doesn't have every capability today, but do you have confidence that they will tomorrow?

Does the provider have powerful partnerships?

Partnerships are critical. They help you operationalize insights, streamline implementation, and onboard and incorporate third party data sets.

Make sure your provider has a continuous business development plan for partnerships tied to their roadmap. You aren't going to stop exploring the newest technologies any time soon. They shouldn't either.

How does the provider handle feedback?

Accepting and responding to feedback is a true sign of the kind of partnership that is critical to your success with a data-driven attribution provider. Ask yourself: does this provider accept client feedback—and even criticism—with interest? Do they actively solicit feedback to improve the offering. Do they act on it?

Bottom Line: Selecting the right data-driven attribution partner is critical to your success in overall marketing performance measurement. Be sure to consider every aspect of the partner's offering and organization to make a great selection.

Step 4: Get prepared

Picking an attribution provider is just the beginning. Next, you must get ready for integration. Streamline implementation by preparing both people and data resources to hit the ground running. Evaluate data readiness and prepare stakeholders ahead of time. This will help you figure out how much support you need during implementation and set your organization up for focused progress towards business goals.

Recruit Cross-Departmental Teams

Establish cross-company involvement so all teams are invested in utilizing attribution insights. It's a good idea to make sure all are accountable to a program owner to provide required inputs. The most successful teams get the following roles involved:

Program owner

You need a program owner to manage onboarding and provide ongoing leadership. Responsible for getting your data-driven attribution program up and running, this person

will ensure all inputs are sent to your provider, even if they are not interested in the outputs. The program owner must keep the project plan provided by your attribution vendor, tracking down all data sets across departments as needed.

Channel owners and analysts

You will need input, agreement, and data access from each of your channel owners. At the minimum, you will need them to provide:

- Access to reporting systems for event identification, impression, click, and cost data for each channel
- KPI and objectives definitions

During step 1, your organization came to consensus on unifying metrics for your marketing campaigns. Now, brief your data-driven attribution provider on your planning and optimization process. This will ensure that consultants set up the most beneficial dashboard views for each of your channel teams.

Traffic managers

These are the team members who make sure ads get trafficked through ad servers and bid management systems. They set up reporting systems and ensure all tracking tags are sent to your third party publishers and advertising partners. As such, they will need to help implement data-driven attribution tracking tags throughout the life of the program.

IT Teams

Don't overlook the need to secure support from IT and web management teams. These teams likely hold the keys to data you have or will wish to collect. Who are the key IT leads that will need to participate?

While IT teams may not be interested in the outputs of your data-driven attribution program, it is crucial that you involve them if you need to make any changes to your website. Other questions to consider asking your IT teams:

- Are there known issues that must be resolved in order to gain access to data?
- Once we access the data, considering the volumes available, do we expect time delays to transfer it?
- Are there any website freeze or maintenance periods we should consider?

Pro Tip: Don't forget to ask about site freezes. Many retailer IT teams lock down websites at critical times, such as during the holiday season, to avoid accidental maintenance outages.

Prepare your Data

How clean and standardized is your data? Putting some thought into data readiness will make implementation smoother. Data modeling solutions are only as good as the data that goes into the model. Examine the inputs required in order to run data-driven attribution and take action where needed.

Event data

Your solution will need data on impressions, clicks, and conversions for each marketing factor that you want incorporated. For example, you may want to include display, search, email and social media in your analysis.

At a minimum, you will need display impressions and clicks, search clicks, email clicks and opens, and social media impressions and clicks. You will also need the volume of action taken on your website from there (total sales, downloads or lead submissions).

Reference data

Event data is time-stamped and associated with a unique identifier. Adding reference data is a key step in making event data more interpretable. For example, event data may show 100 impressions for creative 12345 in placement 6850385. Rather than recognizing it by number, you'd rather see that this was your spring sale creative on MediaMath's behaviorally targeted 300x250 placement.

Likewise, reference data allows data groupings. If you have 1000 creative types, you want to group them by message (across different sizes) to evaluate the creative content. Without reference data to provide context, reporting becomes less actionable for your teams.

Cost data

The last major piece of data that an attribution solution should take into consideration is cost. Without associating cost to marketing tactics, it's difficult to evaluate performance across tactics. For example, if you had a search ad that brings in 10 sales and an email that brings in 10 sales, you might consider them equally valuable. If you added in cost, however, you will see that your search ad cost \$10 total for those 10 sales (eCPA of \$1) while the email cost \$1000 (eCPA of \$100).

It is extremely important to incorporate cost data for all paid marketing channels in order to get true value comparisons. Once you know which data points you want to incorporate into your data-driven attribution solution, be sure to plan three key factors into your timeline:

1. Data Standardization: Clicks on your website are recorded through a piece of code that captures the referring source information. You will need to define unified tracking URL parameters for this to work.

2. DMP Integration: Compare capabilities and formats between your DMP and your data-driven attribution provider. Connect the two early and ensure a compatible working relationship.

3. Data Hygiene: To begin prepping data sets for transfer to your attribution provider, your organization must run tests to ensure that the data is “clean”, not garbled and ready to run through the model smoothly.

Bottom Line: Data integration takes effort. To drive the maximum benefit in the shortest amount of time, rally your organization to prioritize action.

Step 5: Evaluate success

To build enthusiasm and credibility for data-driven attribution, you must envision and evaluate success. Having defined conversion events and what marketing success looks like for your organization, leverage those goals and metrics to rigorously evaluate your provider's performance. Consider the entire engagement from measured gains to quality of service.

Marketing performance

As you see increases in marketing performance and decreases in cost or inefficiency, share bottom-line indicators of success with stakeholders. Look for:

- eCPA reduction
- Optimization within channels
- Optimization across channels
- Level-of-effort reduction in reporting

Enterprise ability

Your provider should help you identify and break down organizational silos. Note areas for potential improvement and move to address them. Look for:

- Holistic budgets more easily managed across marketing teams
- KPIs and success metrics aligned across all departments

Ease and flexibility

It should be easy to make changes in your data-driven attribution program as you learn more. Be sure that your provider tailors services and processes to your specific needs. Look for:

- Clear ownership of the change process
- Progress tracked between your teams and your provider team
- Timely responses to customization or cancellation requests

Quality of output

Data-driven attribution insights should be reported and interpreted in a way that is clear and actionable for your organization. Look for:

- Teams that use attribution tools to easily view and interpret insights
- The organization's ability to readily put these insights to use
- The ability to confirm that insights are based on accurate data

Total cost of ownership

Your provider must deliver within established budget parameters and without hidden costs or scope issues. Look for:

- Clear, up-front pricing options and variations
- Flexible choices in attribution reporting so you can tailor the solution to your needs without hidden charges for customization
- Whether data-driven attribution costs represent a reasonable percentage of overall marketing spend

Strong road map

Your provider will both keep pace with industry advances and adapt to your changing needs. Look for:

- A flexible platform that can combine data-driven attribution with modern MMM
- A growing customer base, strong partnerships, and a track record of innovation

Bottom Line: Your stakeholders will be more invested in data-driven attribution if they can envision what success looks like, and concretely evaluate whether goals are being achieved. Show them the way.

Make your move to data-driven attribution

Today's top marketers need better marketing performance measurement practices to complete. Adopting data-driven attribution means taking a look inward at your business before you can look out. The potential gains are worth the effort.

Get on the road to fact-based decision-making by evaluating potential solutions and providers with an informed eye. Ensure your organization can onboard, gather, and take action on insights.

Soon, you'll find that examining the customer journey with data-driven attribution is the key to refining your marketing strategy and improving performance at every step.

Glossary

C

Conversion Path – A series of marketing touchpoints encompassing all interactions a customer has with a business before making a purchase.

Conversions – Actions that convert a person into a paying customer. While they typically involve the sale of goods or services, conversions can also be softer, such as signing up for a newsletter, or downloading a coupon.

D

Data-Driven Attribution – A form of marketing attribution modeling that relies on the marketing data itself to help build and refine the model, instead of using arbitrary rules or pre-determined weights to determine attribution credit.

Data Normalization – The process of organizing the contents of one or many databases to reduce redundancy and dependency, thereby increasing efficient use of the data.

Data Modeling – The process of modeling an information system, such as a business's marketing operations), based on known data about the system in order to better understand complex interdependencies and effects of change upon the system.

E

eCPA – Effective Cost Per Action (eCPA) is a metric used to gauge the effectiveness of advertising in terms of the average cost of each action or conversion.

K

KPIs – Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are qualitative business measurements intended to gauge success or failure. KPIs will differ based on department or business goals, but a good KPI will always be formulated after a clear understanding of business operations, limitations and goals has been achieved.

P

Programmatic Buying – Automated advertising exchanges that buy, sell and serve display ads. These integrated marketing systems allow marketers to dynamically control the volume, price and targeted audience of display advertising.

R

ROI – Return on Investment (ROI) is a metric used to judge the efficiency of an investment. $ROI = (\text{gain from investment} - \text{cost of investment}) / \text{cost of investment}$.

ROAS – Return on Ad Spend (ROAS) is a ratio used to determine the dollar amount earned for every dollar spent in advertising. An ROAS of 11:1 would mean you received \$11 in sales for every \$1 you spent on advertising.

RTB – (Real Time Bidding) A programmatic way of selling individual ad inventory to the highest bidder on a per-impression basis. RTB allows advertisers to optimize ad spend across multiple platforms and is a component of the larger programmatic buying ecosystem.

S

Segmentation – A marketing strategy that involves breaking a large audience into smaller sub-sets based on similar traits. Common marketing segments center around geographic, demographic and behavioral intent data.

About the Google Analytics 360 Suite

The Google Analytics 360 Suite offers powerful and integrated analytics solutions for today's biggest enterprises. Measure and improve the impact of your marketing across every screen, channel and moment in today's customer journey. It's easy to use, and makes data accessible for everyone so the "aha" moments are simple to discover and share. Move from insight to impact faster with the Analytics 360 Suite.

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